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Title
Foreward

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4q09h74f

ISBN
978-1-85604-720-3

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Publication Date
2012

Copyright Information

Peer reviewed

Preface to *Evaluating and Measuring the Value, Use and Impact of Digital Collections,* Lorna Hughes, Editor; Facet Publishing, 2012.

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This set of chapters on digital collections fills an important gap in the professional literature of the memory institutions: libraries, museums, and archives. While much has been written of late on the evolution of digital scholarship, most analyses are written by and for scholars. These chapters are written by librarians, archivists, and scholars engaged in building assembling and digitizing content for a range of audiences, largely in the humanities. As noted in the acknowledgements, the book emerged from an expert seminar in e-Research. The result is a coherent arrangement of chapters from a group of authors collaborating toward a common goal of identifying metrics for digital collections.

They survey developments, concerns, best practices, and criteria for evaluation in a wide range of projects across the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand – where these authors currently are based – with reference to projects in the United States and elsewhere. The comparison of efforts in libraries, museums, and archives, which in turn serve universities, schools, theatres, and other environments, offers a rich set of case studies. A number of policy issues cut across these environments, most notably intellectual property rights and provenance.

Information professionals, managers, and students alike will find much of value in this volume. The current environment of accountability is particularly problematic for the humanities. The "impact" or value of collections may not be evident for years, decades, or even centuries after the origin of the materials, yet funders demand immediate economic indicators. These chapters take a balanced approach, acknowledging the tradeoff in short and long term assessment of value, and to whom.

In all fields, the availability of scholarly content in digital form makes possible new research questions, methods, and uses. The humanities especially have benefited from the ability to digitize historic documents, to mine large corpuses of texts, audio, and images, and to assemble widely dispersed cultural objects into common repositories for comparison and analysis. Yet digitization is a means for scholarship and learning, not an end in itself. Careful assessments are required of tradeoffs between usability and honesty to original form, between image quality, speed of access, and cost, and between assorted other project-specific factors. Managers must identify their goals clearly to steer their way through the sea of standards that apply to digital projects. The orientation toward assessing use and users is particularly valuable, as it is often under-appreciated in digital projects.

Some of the projects represented here go well beyond scholarship, making historical resources useful not only for research, teaching, and learning, but also for "enjoyment." Would that all digital projects keep the joy of discovery at the center of attention!